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AUTHOR Lowenstein, Ronnie B.
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ABSTRACT

A one-day meeting of leaders of basic skills organizations was held in order to create a consortium to promote the sharing of ideas and information, assist in the transfer of effective programs and materials, and encourage the joint development of new programs and products to train adults and youth in need. After familiarizing themselves with the issues by reading a summary report, participants completed the following tasks: (1) derived a mission statement of the Basic Skills Consortium Through the States; (2) identified priority activities, including communicating the availability of and access to existing basic skills information, and evaluating programs and products; (3) discussed and reported on key issues such as capacity-building, product development and evaluation, information exchange, and organizational structure; and (4) proposed an action plan that would move the issues discussed by the consortium into an operational phase. A copy of the summary report is attached, as well as a listing of attendees, their addresses, and telephone numbers. (DB)

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# ORGANIZING A BASIC SKILLS CONSORTIUM:

## The Results of a Meeting
## September 29, 1989
## Washington, D.C.

**Sponsored by:** Office of Strategic Planning & Policy Development
Employment & Training Administration
US Department of Labor

**Hosted by:** The Center for Advanced Learning Systems
*Operated by CSR, Incorporated*

**Prepared by:** Ronnie B. Lowenstein, Ed. D.
Consultant
(703) 255 - 0990

IR014483



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# A Personal Note from the Conference Coordinator

Congratulations to participants who gathered on September 29th. to create a basic skills consortium through the states. Despite the diversity of beliefs and intensity of convictions, a co-operative spirit prevailed that permitted the achievement of consensus on major goals. The workplan adopted at the close of the meeting presents a coherent strategy that will move the vision of a consortium through the states from an exciting concept towards an operational reality within a year. That is quite an accomplishment!

To me, what is extra special about the plan is the compatibility of the concept with the problems it seeks to address. The multiple issues associated with our nation's basic skills crisis are complex and interrelated. As a result, no *one* agency at any level of government can solve the problems in isolation; nor can an agency at any level take full responsibility for them. The Basic Skills Consortium Through the States provides opportunities for dealing holistically with complex policy issues while respecting the integrity of its multiple constituents.

Those committed professionals who now take up the effort to design the details of the plan will have many challenges ahead. Foremost among them will be maintaining a momentum of energy and action while extending the broad base of support among those closest to the problems.

Best of luck!

Sincerely,

Ronnie B. Lowenstein

Ronnie B. Lowenstein, Ed. D.

## Table of Contents


| | Page |
|---|---|
| Personal Note from the Conference Coordinator | |
| Background Information | 1 |
| Outcomes of the Meeting | 3 |
| Summary of the Basic Skills Consortium Planning Meeting | 4 |
| Tasks 1 & 2: Deriving A Mission Statement | 5 |
| Task 3: Identifying Priority Activities | 7 |
| Task 4: Identifying Self-Selecting Working Groups | 9 |
| Task 5: Reporting Out By The Working Groups | |
| Work Group: Capacity-Building | 10 |
| Work Group: Product Development and Evaluation | 11 |
| Work Group: Information Exchange | 12 |
| Work Group: Organizational Structure | 13 |
| Work Group: Strategies Needed to Operationalize a Consortium | 15 |
| Appendices: | |
| Appendix A: The Summary Report | |
| Appendix B: Listing of Attendees (Updated) | |
| Appendix C: Listing of Supporters Unable to Attend | |

**ORGANIZING A BASIC SKILLS CONSORTIUM:**
**The Results of a Meeting**
**September 29, 1989**
**Washington, D.C.**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The concept of a "Basic Skills Consortium" evolved out of the desire among states to creatively address the basic skills crisis. A number of state leaders discussed developing a consortium in order to promote sharing of ideas and information, assist in the transfer of effective programs and materials, and encourage the joint development of new programs and products to train adults and youth in need.

In response to the expressed needs and interests of the states, the Center for Advanced Learning Systems, as part of its contract with the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development, hosted a one-day planning meeting to facilitate the creation of a consortium. Mr. Ray Uhalde, Deputy Administrator (ETA/OSPPD) issued invitations to leaders from JTPA and basic skills organizations who were interested in establishing a consortium. The meeting was held on September 29th. from 7:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at the Bellevue Hotel in Washington, D.C.

The goals of the meeting were:

- to develop a consortium mission statement
- to prioritize major consortium activities
- to design the organizational structure
- to develop strategies needed to move the consortium into an operational phase.

Recognizing that the goals were ambitious and the time for the meeting in D.C. was limited, CALS decided to elicit views of potential participants prior to the meeting. A written inquiry was sent out on July 11th. The survey and personal telephone contacts prompted an enthusiastic response. Fifty-three respondents from twenty-three states expressed their beliefs related to the goals of the meeting. The information was then synthesized into a Summary Report. It was this Summary Report that then guided the agenda of the meeting.

The meeting itself was run in parallel with the "Roundtable," a group interested in promoting the sharing of federally-sponsored training packages. While the focus of the agenda was to develop consensus regarding the basic skills consortium, opportunity was created for the federal and state groups to communicate both formally and informally. Joint social breaks were arranged, starting with the opening continental breakfast and followed by a mid-morning coffee break and noon buffet lunch. While dining, attendees were treated to the mellow jazz sounds of Chuck Woods' "Young Bucks." More formal sharing between the federal and state groups was scheduled in the afternoon. After lunch, both Mr. Ray Uhalde (DOL) and Mr. Joe Clark, Deputy Director (NTIS) presented brief remarks that conveyed their support of the efforts extended by the attendees from both meetings. Later, the two groups reunited for a joint "reporting out."

OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

By the end of the day, after working as a total group and in small working groups, the 43 participants had accomplished three out of the four goals of the meeting:

#1 They had voted to accept the following working description of the mission:

"The mission of the Basic Skills Consortium through the states will be to increase the capacity of states, counties, cities and service providers to enhance the delivery of basic skills training in order to improve the quality of the current and future workforce."

#2 They identified three priority activities of the consortium: promoting information sharing, particularly through a clearinghouse; encouraging joint development and assessment of products and programs; and advancing capacity building.

#3 They unanimously accepted a plan to move the consortium into an operational phase:

The attendees selected a Workgroup, representative of a broad-based and geographically diverse membership. The Workgroup agreed to develop a series of documents that first addressed the philosophic questions of "what" and "why" before moving into the questions of "how" to create a Basic Skills Consortium. In developing the documents, the Workgroup agreed to not only review and synthesize details of discussions from this meeting, along with details from the initial inquiry that had been presented in the Summary Report, but also to solicit comments from various stakeholders of basic skills education in their geographic regions. Using the solicited input, individual Workgroup members would clarify the Consortium document and then "feed the revised document into" regional conferences held in conjunction with the already scheduled JTPA Performance Standards '90 conferences between March and May 1990. The goal would be both to broaden the constituency for the consortium and to provide additional opportunities for input into the process of its creation. Following the last conference, the Workgroup would make final recommendations to all interested consortium constituents. Concurrently, an elected National Steering Committee would meet in June or July to act on the recommendations, moving the organization into an operational phase.

#4 They accepted the recommendations of the Organizational Work Group to "allow form to follow function" and to delay decisions on design until the Workgroup has revised plans for the major activities.

## SUMMARY OF THE BASIC SKILLS CONSORTIUM PLANNING MEETING

Welcoming remarks were made by David Barbee (CALS) and Darcia Bracken (NTIS) to the [43] participants representing [23] states and organizations concerned with basic skill development. Ronnie Lowenstein (Conference Coordinator) led the participants in an introductory exercise, presented the agenda, and introduced the Summary Report. The Summary Report synthesized the results of a preconference inquiry of conference participants and presented a scope of beliefs concerning the creation of a basic skills consortium.

With the Summary Report as a basis, the participants were charged with the tasks of deriving a mission statement, identifying major activities of the proposed consortium, selecting working groups to develop recommendations, and to report out to the joint meeting of the Basic Skills Consortium and the Roundtable.

A summary of the task activities, conclusions, and recommendations of the workgroups is presented on the following pages.

## TASKS 1 & 2: DERIVING A MISSION STATEMENT

Participants were first asked to individually review the thirteen pages of the Summary Report in order to become familiar with the scope of views presented. The report dealt with the proposed mission statement, major activities of the consortium, organizational structure, and strategies needed to move the consortium into an operational phase. Its structure corresponded to the structure of the meeting.

Participants were then asked to reexamine the issues dealing with the mission statement, discuss their personal reactions with their table group and then share some of their comments with the total group.

Following is a summary of those shared comments:

-John Dorrer expressed concern about moving too quickly without studying the issues. He desired to flush out issues by using the meeting as a focus group that would articulate issues clearly. He felt discomfort with "jumping" into defining a mission statement before exploring philosophic issues.

-Skip Johnston clarified capacity building as a type of umbrella that needs to be defined by JTPA, education etc. He argued that capacity building is making the system better in order to facilitate its operation.

-Holly Miles suggested changes of wording on the mission statement which was recorded and incorporated. She also urged that the Consortium "ought not to be static, nor operate outside of business and industry."

-Alan Zuckerman suggested deletions and other changes of wording on the mission statement which were also recorded on the flip chart.

-Joe Racek suggested that the mission statement be clarified by : (1) more clearly differentiating between activities 1 and 2, (2) changing the first to read, "establish a clearinghouse," (3) adding the specific activities of capacity building, such as technical assistance, staff development and training, and (4) eliminating activities 5 and 6.

-Syd Jaffee requested the wording of establishing a consortium "through the states" since states have skeletal structures that need to be expanded to include the private sector, PICS, SDAs,CBOs, etc.

In an open discussion that ensued, the following ideas were expressed:

-Nicky Askov shared her understanding that the consortium would not actually engage in creation of training products, but rather would encourage the states and regions to jointly develop products.

-David Barbee questioned whether it would make sense to make the mission of the consortium "capacity building?" This did not seem to engander any group response.

-Concern was expressed that the wheel not be reinvented.

-Skip Johnston asserted that there was a need to better define basic skills and how we get some.

-"The mission statement needs to be a "what statement" and not a "how."

-Ron McGage agreed on the necessity of defining the goal before designing the how; but suggested we first determine if we all agree on wanting a consortium.

A show of hands indicated strong support for the creation of a consortium. Additional comments were made:

-Harvey Taub suggested tying the consortium into the current welfare reform movement. There was little support for that.

-Alan Zuckerman suggested adding cities, counties not just states to the mission statement.

-Charlene Walker stressed the importance of exploring what already exists in data bases, such as ERIC, VTECS, etc.

-The need to recast the mission statement was reiterated.

A show of hands indicated total agreement with the need to revise the mission statement. Within a few minutes, group consensus was reached on the following mission statement:

---

"The mission of the Basic Skills Consortium through the States will be to increase the capacity of states, counties, cities and service providers to enhance the delivery of basic skills training in order to improve the quality of the current and future workforce."

---

TASK 3: IDENTIFYING PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

The third task presented to the attendees was to reexamine the 7 activities of the Basic Skills Consortium in order to identify three priority functions. Again, the process they were requested to follow included individual consideration first, table discussion next, and total group sharing last.

Below are the proposed elements of the mission statement that are found on page 1 of The Summary Report:

1. To promote the exchange of basic skills training program information, technologies and materials. (The term "clearinghouse" was frequently used to describe the principal function.)

2. To facilitate the transfer of basic skills training programs, assessment instruments and materials among and within the states.

3. To identify common needs in providing basic skills development and to encourage joint development of new products and programs.

4. To evaluate programs, technologies and materials, providing such information to the membership.

5. To provide leadership to legislators and Congress regarding policies and legislation affecting basic skills development programs.

6. To provide input on the development of standards for the area of Basic Skills with Industry and others.

7. To advance "capacity building" among the state and local leaders in basic skills projects.

Below is a summary of comments presented by tables:

-Table 1 felt the major function of the Basic Skills Consortium ought to be to identify and communicate the availability of existing basic skills information and how to access it. Therefore, their recommendation was to combine activities 1, 2, and 7.

-Table 2 concurred with the importance of a clearinghouse function, but indicated the desire for a "proactive" clearinghouse that would be concerned with the effectiveness and quality of programs and products listed. They not only wanted to combine activities 1 and 2, but include 3 & 7 as vital functions.

-Table 4 also assented to the prioritizing of activities as- 1, 2, & 7; but, they added the suggestion that the other activities be incorporated into those three.

-Table 3, with Skip Johnston as spokesperson, declined to participate in the structure suggested. This group suggested using the assembled meeting as a focus group to further explore the nature of the basic skills crisis. They expressed the desire to "slow the process down" in order to ask and answer a series of questions, such as "Why? and What ?" Why does America need basic skills? Why does America need a Basic Skills Consortium? What are basic skills? How should we respond? In addition, they submitted an alternative approach to the meeting with the basic skills issues being a subset of the larger category of capacity building, rather than capacity building being a subset of the basic skills issues.

In the ensuing discussion, there was recognition of the need for clearer definitions of basic skills:

-Trish McNeil stated that, "There is no clear definition of basic skills when DOL talks to education people. There are always new skills being added; BEFORE we talk about proceeding we need to clarify the general definition of basic skills.

-Table 4 argued that the assembled group can not define basic skills at this meeting; but, suggested a narrowing of the issue, perhaps to employment related skills. They also suggested that the nature of the clearinghouse be defined. Lastly, this table urged that the clearinghouse activities incorporate evaluation.

Other remarks noted:

-The Basic Skills Consortium ought to study such important issues as definitions, curriculum, technologies and then synthesize the deliberations.

-Skip Johnston from Table 3 agreed to the original conception of the consortium, but urged that the questions of "Why?, What? and How?" be considered within all of the working groups.

TASK FOUR: IDENTIFYING SELF-SELECTING WORKING GROUPS

The fourth task was to create and self-select working groups and after exploring issues related to the group, reach accord regarding the group's recommendations.

Discussion revealed consensus over limiting the number of working groups to five. The anticipated sixth group that would have dealt with legislative issues and performance standards was eliminated, with the intention that the issues be incorporated by the working group dealing with information sharing.

Following is the list of the five working groups with the names of their facilitators and rapporteurs:

| GROUP | FACILITATOR | RAPPORTEUR |
|---|---|---|
| Information Sharing | Alan Zuckerman | Mike Zotos |
| Product Development & Evaluation | Nicky Askov | Nicky Askov |
| Capacity Building | Holly Miles | John Dorrer |
| Organizational Structure | Ron McGage | Ron McGage |
| Operational Strategies | Joe Racek | Nadine Frindrich |

Because the morning discussions and process of self-selecting working groups took more time than anticipated, there was need to adjust the afternoon plans and provide the groups with more time to discuss and consolidate their ideas.

The afternoon plans were changed in three ways. First, the schedule was altered; sharing reports with The Roundtable was delayed to allow an additional 30 minutes after lunch for group discussion. Second, to save some time, the location of the reporting out was reversed; the Roundtable was invited to join the Basic Skills Consortium in their meeting room instead of vice versa. Lastly, not all the Consortium work groups reported out; the fifth group, the "Strategies Needed To Operationalize the Basic Skills Consortium," waited until the Roundtable exited before sharing their proposal. It seemed appropriate to respect the privacy of The Basic Skills group as it voted on "the next steps."

## TASK FIVE: REPORTING OUT BY THE WORKING GROUPS

**Work Group: Capacity-Building**
**Rapporteur: John Dorrer**

The Capacity-Building work group organized their thoughts around four areas of concern. They discussed the need to clarify the term "capacity-building" by specifying its activities and goals. They recommended that the term include staff training and development, research and development, information sharing, and system evaluations. They also noted that the goals of capacity building should focus on the end products and involve improving skills and competencies of professionals, as well as involve increasing productivity of systems.

A second point of their discussion dealt with the need for expanding the conceptions of capacity building to recognize the relationship between the individual and the system and to work towards an alignment of the individual and the system. "Capacity building is needed wherever basic skills are delivered; this includes both public and private settings." They briefly noted that one way to meet that need would be to create an inventory of "experts" in each state.

The third area of discussion centered on the consortium need to look at previous efforts of other organizations "to learn from the triumphs and avoid the mistakes." An example cited was the DOL efforts in information sharing.

Lastly, the group stressed the importance of definitional issues since "how we define issues will direct problem solving strategies." John recounted that while his group had a strong debate, eight out of the ten group members accepted the definition of basic skills to include reading, math, written communication, oral communication and problem solving.

**Work Group: Product Development and Evaluation**
**Rapporteur: Nicky Askov**

The group suggested the term "assessment" be used instead of the term, "evaluation." They saw a need for all existing products to be run through an assessment with a summary done which includes results. In response to that need, they proposed that a major function of the consortium should or could be to serve as the "central assessment office " for all programs which are being circulated. They perceived that providing access to a short write up that could be quickly reviewed would be of great benefit to states and individual organizations.

They also recognized that in establishing an assessment office, the consortium would have to set some standards that would be represented in any good program. By so doing, programs could then be tailored to meet known needs as well as to meet the criteria for excellence.

They recommended that the consortium utilize a bottoms-up approach. Taking information from the bottom level, consortium staff could translate requests for information about specific programs and criticisms into appropriate responses. They further recommended applying that approach to sharing curricula and programs that are transportable. SDAs could nominate their best programs that could be transported to other states. The information about those programs could be entered into a databank by specific characteristics. The databank would be accessible nationwide by computer linkages via modems.

Lastly, the group felt that the financial resource for such a database could be the JTPA Service Delivery Areas; it would make sense for the SDAs to support a system that they created and needed.

**Work Group: Information Exchange**
**Rapporteur: Mike Zotos**

This group discussed three topics: how to create a market for information, the processes involved in information exchange, and financial support for the activities.

They suggested the necessity of conducting research: (1) to identify the needs of states, all the way down to the service provider level, and (2) to identify existing systems, "so as not to reinvent the wheel." Once existing systems are identified, the next task would be to learn how to access them.

They proposed that the consortium provide information to a broad-based audience, as broad and as inclusive as possible, down to program operators. Furthermore, they recommended that all means of communication, including existing newsletters, conferences, and teleconferences, be used to establish the network of communication. They recognized that to do so requires a training effort that would help practitioners become skilled information gatherers. They also expressed a hope that such efforts would promote cross-fertilization among the federal government agencies, schools, states, etc.

Lastly, they noted that since most employment and training program information is not in existing data bases, substantial money will be needed to get the information into the data bases. Once the data is stored, users can pay. They offered a "quick and dirty" solution: create a print pamphlet that shows how to access data from the computer system and then develop a "dog and pony show" that will create interest and vitality.

**Work Group: Organizational Structure**
**Rapporteur: Ron McGage**

In explaining how their discussion shifted from structure of a basic skills consortium to dealing with issues of "how to get this organization rolling," Ron McGage made the following remarks:

> " We felt that the points made in the written report were very valid regarding the scope of issues concerning the organization itself. We also felt that it was too early to suggest a formal structure since a major principle of design is that form follows function. At this point we are faced with the dilemma that we lack the ground information to make organizational structure decisions as well as those dealing with place, delineation of government-private sector responsibility, or possible relationship with the academic community."

To accomplish the task at hand, the work group offered the following recommendations:

* Move ahead under CALS with the immediate formation of an ad hoc task force to really deal with the nitty gritty.

* Approach the Secretaries of Labor, Health and Human Services, Defense, Commerce, as well as organized labor and business and industry for initial grants to serve as the seed money for conducting the organizational aspects of the consortium.

* Hold a national conference regarding work-related basic skills. Use a part of the registration fee for dues to support and expand the consortium.

* Write the states to see how many would be interested in making a one time or on going contribution of 10-25,000 dollars per year to support the consortium.

* Determine whether states would be willing to contribute human and material resources as well.

* Consider the clearinghouse as a possible base for the establishment of a prison industry.

* Develop a broad-based membership that includes every element of the education and training communities interested in work related basic skills. This would include membership of state agencies, institutional organizations (business and industry), service providers, and individuals.

* Review similar organizations to see what works and what doesn't. Six possible organizations to review are:

  VTECS = Vocational Technical Education Consortium of States

  MAVCC = Mid-America Vocational Curriculum Consortium

  NOCTI = National Occupational Competency Testing Institute

  NNCCVTE = National Network for Curriculum Co-ordination in Vocational Technical Education

  SREB = Southern Region Education Board Consortium on the Integration of Basic Skills

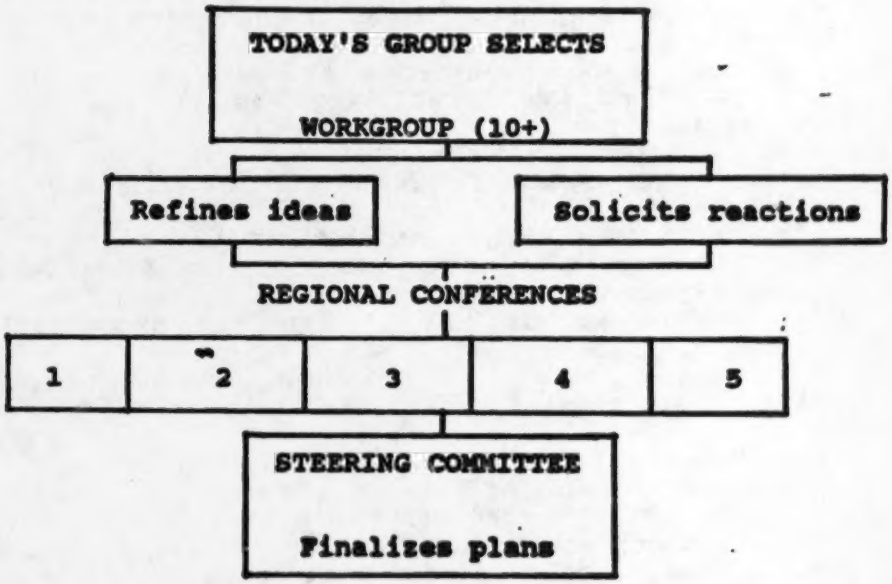
  NCRVE = National Center for Research in Vocational Education

* Lastly, since what is being discussed appears to be defined as a National Center, consider federal legislation as a source of funding. (Note the NCRVE, NNCCVTE and the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act).

**Work Group: Strategies Needed to Operationalize a Consortium**
**Rapporteur: Nadine Frindrich**

The facilitator of this group, Joe Racek, presented an action plan that attempted to: (1) synthesize the interests and concerns expressed during the day, (2) maintain the process of maximizing the input of the greatest number of people, and (3) move the consortium into an operational phase.

**DIAGRAM OF THE PROPOSED PLAN**




**EXPLANATION OF THE PROPOSED PLAN**

- The attendees would select a workgroup that would be representative of a broad-based membership, reflecting interests of JTPA, Education, Private Industry, Private Interest Groups, etc.

- Their task would be to develop a series of documents that first addressed the philosophic questions of what and why before moving into the questions of how to create a Basic Skills Consortium.

- The documents would include a rationale explaining why the consortium should be developed, a mission statement, operational objectives, plans for the organizational structure, and short and long-term operational plans.

- In developing the documents, Workgroup members would not only review and synthesize details of discussions from this meeting along with details from the initial inquiry that had been presented in Summary Report#1, but they would also solicit comments from various stakeholders of basic skills education in their area.

- Workgroup members might consider organizing " town meetings" or soliciting written responses to the ideas and documents.

- Using the solicited input, individual Workgroup members would clarify the Consortium document and then "feed the revised document into" a regional conference, such as one of the five Performance Standards Conferences held from March to May every year. Again, the goal would be to broaden opportunities for input into the process of creating a consortium.

- The Workgroup would then incorporate that information into recommendations. Concurrently, they would elect 2-3 representatives from each of the five geographic regions of the U.S. to participate on a National Steering Committee. The National Steering Committee would meet (in June or July) and use the recommendations to move the organization into an operational phase.

Following this presentation, a total group discussion ensued:

Two comments were made, one noting the need for a chair who could coordinate all efforts and resources and act like an information link. A second was the suggestion (by Skip Johnston) that the Workgroup could act as a resource for organizations, like DOL, NTIS, etc., and learn from them about the current activities of common concern, i.e. database development, directories, etc.

Then there was silence. Joe asked the group if there were any suggestions. There were none. He called for a vote and participants unanimously voted (without any abstentions) in favor of the proposed plan.

Joe then called for volunteers for the Workgroup that would meet at the end of the general meeting to identify a chair, draft a tentative schedule for future action and a meeting time and place for the next meeting. It was determined that there would be 11 categories, ten representing the ten regions around the U.S. and an eleventh to represent stakeholders of basic skills education who do not necessarily identify with a geographic region, such as NGA, DOL, or organizations affiliated with academia, etc.

The volunteers met at the close of the meeting and selected New Orleans for the site of the Workgroup meeting to be held on December 11-12, 1989. The Workgroup list follows.

## Workgroups: Creating A Basic Skills Consortium

**Region**

1 — Mr. John Dorrer, Sr.
Vice President
Training & Development Corporation
P.O. Box 1136
117 Broadway
Bangor ME 04401
(207)945-9431

2 — Mr. Jack Curtin
Deputy Director
Division of Planning & Policy Development
New York State Department of Labor
State Office Campus Building 12
Room 419
Albany NY 12240
(518)457-8881

3 — Mr. Lewis Mott
Region III
Pennsylvania Dept of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg PA 17126-0333
(717)783-6629

4 — Mr. Skip Johnston
Director, Division of Labor & Employment & Training
Florida Department of Labor & Employment Security
1320 Executive Center Drive
#300
Tallahassee FL 32301
(904)488-7228

5 — Mr. Griffin Brooks
Office of Instructional Programs
Georgia Department of Education
JTPA Unit
1762 E. Twin Tower
Atlanta GA 30334
(404)656-2521

6 — No representative

7 Mr. Robert Levy
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Louisiana Department of Labor
P.O. Box 94094
Baton Rouge LA 70804-9094
(504)342-7693

8 Ms. Toni Alcott
Compliance Specialist
Governor's Job Training Office
1391 N. Speer Boulevard
Suite 440
Denver CO 80204
(303)620-4658

9 Mr. David Van Wagner
Liason Monitor - JTPA
Arizona Department of Economic Security
Site Code 920Z
P.O. Box 6123
Phoenix AZ 85005
(602)542-2492

10 Mr. Joe Racek
Department of Employment Security
605 Woodview Drive, SE
Mail Stop KG-11
Olympia WA 98504
(206)438-4611

* Dr. Walter F. Dunlavey
Research Associate, Center for Labor Studies
Carnegie-Mellon University
School of Urban & Public Affairs
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890
(412)268-2177

* Dr. David E. Barbee
Director, Center for Advanced Learning Systems
US Department of Labor
Room N-6511
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
(202)523-5600

* Dr. Alan Zuckerman
OICs of America
1511 K Street, N.W.
Suite 1041
Washington, DC 20005
(202)737-2166

* Dr. Ronnie Lowenstein
Consultant
2808 Jermantown Rd.
Oakton, VA 22124
(703)255-0990

* Mary DeGonia
President
Capitol Perspective
1915 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
(202)265-5271

# Appendix A: The Summary Report

**SUMMARY REPORT:**

# Creating A Basic Skills Consortium of the States

Dr. Ronnie B. Lowenstein
Dr. David B. Barbee

## TABLE OF CONTENTS: Summary of Contents


| | |
|---|---|
| Proposed Mission Statement | 1 |
| Summary: Major Activities | 2 |
| Summary: Organizational Considerations | 8 |
| Summary: Strategies to Operationalize | 11 |

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

A project of this depth and scope can only be accomplished through cooperative efforts. On this project, we have enjoyed the dedicated commitment of many people.

Appreciation is extended to: Fernando Alegria of the National Governor's Association; Libby Queen and Joanne Weikel of the US Department of Labor Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Development, and the staff at the Center for Advanced Learning Systems, including Cynthia Heine, David Clem, and Robert Farina.

## PROPOSED MISSION STATEMENT
## FOR THE BASIC SKILLS CONSORTIUM OF THE STATES

The mission of the Basic Skills Consortium of the States has been defined to include the following elements:

1. To promote the exchange of basic skills training program information, technologies and materials. (The term "clearinghouse" was frequently used to describe the principal function.)

2. To facilitate the transfer of basic skills training programs, assessment instruments and materials among and within the states.

3. To identify common needs in providing basic skills development and to encourage joint development of new products and programs.

4. To evaluate programs, technologies and materials, providing such information to the membership.

5. To provide leadership to legislators and Congress regarding policies and legislation affecting basic skills development programs.

6. To provide input on the development of standards for the area of Basic Skills with Industry and others.

7. To advance "capacity building" among the state and local leaders in basic skills projects.

**CONCERNS RELATED TO THE MISSION**

Several comments reflected the need for clarification of the role of the Consortium in relation to:

- the overall national literacy movement
- federal policy dealing with performance standards, etc.
- linkage to different agencies concerned with basic skills at different levels of government

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS: MAJOR ACTIVITIES

The suggested activities of the Basic Skills Consortium fall into seven categories:

1. Exchanging information
2. Facilitating the transfer of programs, technologies, and materials
3. Promoting co-operative product development
4. Evaluating programs, technologies, and materials
5. Providing leadership to legislators and Congress
6. Providing input on Basic Skills standards
7. Advancing "capacity building"

### 1. EXCHANGING INFORMATION

Suggested techniques for states' sharing of information included the creation of a national database/clearinghouse, establishing an electronic bulletin board, and publication of a print newsletter on a variety of state activities, i.e. exemplary programming, research findings and expertise.

Most interest was expressed in the activities related to the national database. There seemed to be an overwhelming consensus that the content of the database would be related to services, products, and programs associated with basic skills. The need for including legislative information was also cited.

Another repeated suggestion was that the Consortium not only gather information, but also establish committees and criteria to evaluate and analyze the impact of the curricula, materials, or programs.

Proposed elements of the database include:

- a directory of member states
- a vendor database made up of product descriptions that would be supported by vendors
- an inventory of currently available basic skills materials/curriculum or assessment systems that are already in place. The inventory should include price lists and sources for commercial and user-developed materials, the name of a contact person, a notation of those in the public domain, the scope of the application, and some evaluation data of what works, with what population, and under what conditions.
- a mechanism to be created for generating and sharing reviews of projects, curriculum materials; then indexing and disseminating the software reviews
- an inventory of formal basic skills research findings related to effective/exemplary materials, assessment tools, training techniques and approaches
- descriptions of model programs

Other proposed elements related to legislative concerns, specifying the following information as important:

- changes necessary with new legislation
- a state by state legislative analysis of what aspects of law are proving helpful/harmful
- a library of state policies regarding state and local administration of the JTPA program
- a compendium of DOL regulations and rules with executive summaries, that would be periodically updated and easily accessed by topics.

## CONCERNS RELATED TO THE DATABASE

Many people shared their interest in thoughtfully addressing the multiple content and technical issues related to developing a database. Some of their questions included:

- o What kind of information would be entered?
- o How can the database be updated regularly?
- o What kind of quality control?
- o Who establishes the criteria for "best" ?
- o Will research be undertaken to develop an inventory of federal, state and local programs for basic skills training? (i.e. ABE, JTPA, & Workplace Literacy Programs)
- o How feasible is it to create a national database?
- o Is there anyway to take advantage of ones that already exist?
- o What mechanisms can be devised to encourage awareness of the database and promote its effective usage?

### (2) FACILITATING THE TRANSFER OF PROGRAMS, TECHNOLOGIES, AND MATERIALS

Many people advocated promoting better use of existing resources through collaboration at the federal, state and local level. Several also proposed coordinated efforts with federal and state organizations involved in basic skills development, such as DOE, Adult Education, Vocational Education, Welfare Agencies, and literacy groups.

Specific recommendations for activities included:

- o Conduct quarterly meetings on a regional level and an annual meeting on a national level, designed to increase dialogue between practitioners, developers of training materials, and vendors. The regional meetings would be optional with cost borne by participating states; the purpose would be to share successful programs and strategies.
- o Organize teleconferences to highlight successful programs and strategies.

- Develop a program of "corporate friends" at the local, regional, and national level who are willing to provide resources and time for employee training.

- Create and disseminate video demonstrations of best practices or of innovative training programs that use technology.

- Promote co-operative efforts between member states and organizations; help to provide on-site training/technical assistance; coordinate knowledge about the training activities by groups outside the Consortium (such as ABE associations or Regional Labs).

- Instruct in how to coordinate services between agencies, highlighting successful joint projects.

**(3) PROMOTING COOPERATIVE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

Sensitivity to the rapidly changing work environment was evident throughout the comments dealing with training products. The following notions were expressed.

The Consortium should:

- Review policies, identify and articulate major issues and barriers to creating training products for basic skills, and then communicate those issues to the education and training community.

- Produce new updated basic skills materials/curriculum and assessment systems to train and to remediate adult learners, paying attention to the needs of employers.

- Encourage designers/producers of basic skills materials, assessment tools, curricula, to incorporate the perspective of the employer, the needs of the workforce, and an analysis of the needed job skills.

- Assist in the development of industry-wide credentials that assess student proficiency levels in a wide variety of academic and vocational areas.

- Promote thoughtful needs assessments in program development in order to match needs projections of occupations with skill development of clients.

- Encourage joint production of technology-based training materials for basic skills education.

**(4) EVALUATING PROGRAMS, TECHNOLOGIES, AND MATERIALS**

Many of the comments suggested the need for evaluations and analysis necessary for informed decision-making. Activities proposed would:

- Support formal evaluations of technology and materials related to basic skills.
- Conduct evaluations of curricula, competency lists and assessment tools considered exemplary, paying attention to what works, under what conditions, and with which populations.
- Create a mechanism for generating reviews of projects and curriculum materials, index and disseminate.

**(5) PROVIDING LEADERSHIP TO LEGISLATORS AND CONGRESS**

Several persons urged that the Consortium carefully consider ways to influence the linkage of agencies that have common concerns with basic skills, but operate at different levels of government.

Some acknowledged the opportunity for the Consortium to inform and influence legislation.

The following activities were proposed:

- Conduct policy reviews, identify major issues affecting basic skills training, disseminate the information.
- Develop a national database that could provide a state by state legislative analysis of what aspects of law are proving helpful/harmful, a library of state policies regarding state and local administration of the JTPA program, and a compendium of DOL regulations and rules with executive summaries. The database would be periodically updated and easily accessed by topics.

**(6) PROVIDING INPUT ON STANDARDS**

Suggested activities of the Consortium that relate to establishing standards were:

- Assist in the development of industry-wide credentials that assess student proficiency levels in a wide variety of academic and vocational areas.

- Explore current demographics of work force needs and analysis of jobs and disseminate that information.

**(7) ADVANCING CAPACITY BUILDING**

Many comments dealt with issues of capacity building; much interest focused on strategies for supporting technical assistance among and within the states.

Activities suggested were:

- Identify trainers/experts in the field; publish a directory of "expert friends."
- Provide technical assistance to member organizations.
- Coordinate information on training activities by groups outside the consortium, such as ABE associations and Regional Labs.
- Assist in the development of training sessions to be provided either on-site or at annually held conferences.
- Promote cooperative efforts between member states; i.e. one state provides training for a fee.
- Develop a program of "corporate friends" at the local, regional, and national level who are willing to give money and time for employee training.
- Train persons involved in training and employment and help establish accreditation of such professionals.

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS: ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Comments indicated difficulty in designing an organizational structure without having a well-defined mission. A few comments suggested the need for clarity in mission. For example:

> Will the consortium be an independent agency? Or linked to on-going organizations? Will it be able to raise funding from states?

It was suggested that the organizational models of V-TECS and the National Association of JTPA Auditors be reviewed in preparation for the design of the Basic Skills Consortium. Two of our participants will be able to brief us: Ron McGage, Director of V-TECS and Toni Alcott, past president of the National Association of JTPA Auditors.

### REGARDING A CENTRAL OFFICE

While all respondents agreed on the necessity of a small, central office staff, there were many varied suggestion and administrative concerns expressed.

One suggestion was that the director and administrative staff would be non-voting members; another recommendation was that the staff would consist of Basic Skills professionals; a third suggestion proposed linking the central office to a university with a strong Adult/Continuing Education Program; a fourth proposal urged that the central office be centrally located and accessible for all states involved.

Some comments related to functions of the central office staff:

- Central leadership would develop specific national goals and timetables.
- Central office would help to organize regional offices.
- Regional committees would work with central office to develop more area-specific goals and objectives.

### REGARDING A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

All but two of the respondents agreed that there was need for a Board of Directors.

Although one person noted that the Board was to serve as a management team, the role of the Board (with delineated power and

responsibility) was not clearly defined. One respondent urged that the Board be a working board, knowledgeable on the subject of basic skills and willing to commit time and effort. Comments failed to specify whether the Board was to establish Consortium policy or simply provide oversight to the central staff to insure that the policies established by the institutional membership are carried out.

Proposals dealing with a Board of Directors included:

- Membership should reflect an equitable geographic representation and the method of selection and appointment should be well-thought out.
- Members should be chosen from the public/private sectors of business, education and labor on the basis of clout and credibility.
- The Board of Directors would include representatives of member states, SDAs, public interest groups, private industry and labor.
- Vendors should be ineligible for the Board of Directors.
- The Board ought to be kept small.
- The size of the Board should reflect the size of the state membership with members being volunteers directly involved with basic skills.

REGARDING MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

Most respondents were in favor of a membership organization rather than a "fee for services" organization, although some combination might be supportable.

Two types of membership were noted-- individual membership and institutional membership.

Suggestions regarding personal membership were:

- Some type of personal membership should be available to all involved in the development, operation and administration of basic skills development programs.
- Personal membership might include a newsletter, linked access to an electronic bulletin board and network, access to information on the database, and attendance at meetings sponsored by the Consortium.

Suggestions regarding institutional membership were:

- Institutional membership might be tiered with nations' regional, state and local membership with differential charges based on size, budget or other variables.
- A broad based membership might include all states and SDAs, JTPA administrative staff, PICs, Labor, NJTC members, Agency representatives from Ed, Social Services at state level, Federal level representatives, Service providers, such as CBO's, national organizations providing employment and training services, community-based organizations, academia.
- Institutional membership could include the right to vote for a board of directors, establish policy, and have full access to all services of the Consortium.

**CONCERNS RELATED TO ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

One respondent suggested that a review be undertaken to assess the workings and effectiveness of the structures of other national consortium efforts:

- Which ones have an effective track record and why?
- Which ones folded and why?
- From the states' perspective, would a regional strategy be more effective than a national one? Or perhaps a combination of the two?

Other concerns related to questions of funding, personnel, location of the Consortium, and whether it would be a public or private entity.

Questions cited included:

- Who should be recruited for membership?
- Who should do the recruitment and how?
- How much money is needed to initiate the effort?
- What is the timeline?
- Where will money be derived to implement the Consortium?

## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS: STRATEGIES TO OPERATIONALIZE

Several people conveyed appreciation for the "bottom up" approach of working from the suggestions of the participant states. They urged the consortium planners to maintain a high level of involvement with member states throughout the creation of the consortium since, "On-going communications are the key to a strong organization."

A suggestion was made to develop strategies in stages, recognizing the need for both short-term and long-term planning. Below are a compilation of suggestions organized according to stages.

### Stage One Strategies at the September Meeting

Clarify the mission:

- Are we to be a resource center, clearinghouse, or lobbying group?
- Articulate the needs and what the Consortium will provide.

Derive and refine the mission statement.

Submit action plans that specify objectives, tasks, and timeframes.

Determine an organizational structure and the plans for eliciting financial support.

Obtain a high degree of commitment and financial support from States in order to implement objectives.

Present a tentative structure with slots for people to fill during the initial meeting.

### Stage Two Strategies: Begin the Action Plans

Hire a consortium planner to coordinate all activities and recommendations of states and committees.

Undertake a survey to determine priorities of activities.

Utilize the various forms of technology to expedite work, such as conference calls, faxing news updates, publishing newsletters.

Plan both short and long-term agendas.

Draft initial letter to potential members.

Involve all agencies and groups that have basic skills development as major responsibility.

Review programs of federal, state, and community-based organizations with similar goals in order to prevent duplication of services, as well as to apply the lessons of their successes or failures.

- Inventory basic skills training projects, including ABE JTPA, and Workplace Literacy programs.
- Review the operation of state ABE information clearinghouses and/or technical assistance centers to determine cost of operation and the states' perceptions of their effectiveness.

To achieve consensus and maintain momentum in creating the Consortium, consider:

- Establishing regional workgroups
- Holding hearings in various regions, perhaps in conjunction with performance standards meetings.
- Organizing a panel of experts from various agencies

To lend credibility to the project, elicit the support of political leaders on both the Federal and state levels. Possible leaders to contact included:

- President Bush
- Secretary of Education and of Labor at both the state and federal level
- Key business associations
- Governors
- States' Secretary of Welfare
- States' Departments of Education

Design the national database:

- Determine the initial content of the database.
- Establish mechanisms to access new materials and to regularly update the existing collection.
- Develop evaluation procedures to insure the quality of content, its relevancy and usefulness.

Stage Three: Long Term Plan of Action

In formalizing the Basic Skills Consortium, various activities will be required, including drafting by-laws, selecting and appointing a Board. Long-term plans will evolve out of the work done in the prior stages.

**CONCERNS RELATED TO STRATEGIES**

A number of participants expressed a desire to act quickly, yet, thoughtfully "to get this organization off the ground."

Many emphasized the need for states to "own" the project.

One person cautioned us to beware the distinction between issues of substance and issues of process. "Let's first agree on our goals."

## Appendix B: Listing of Attendees (Updated)

Ms. Toni Alcott
Compliance Specialist
Governor's Job Training Office
1391 N. Speer Boulevard
Suite 440
Denver CO 80204
(303)620-4658

Dr. Eunice N. Askov
Director, Inst. for Study of Adult Lit.
Penn State University College of Education
248 Calder Way
Suite 307
University Park PA 16801
(814)863-3777

Dr. David E. Barbee
Director, Center for Advanced Learning Systems
US Dept. of Labor
Room N-6511
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
(202)523-5600

Ms. Linda Bergeron
Texas Workforce Development Division
Texas Dept of Commerce
8317 Cross Park Drive
Austin TX 78754
(512)834-6362

Ms. Cathie Bounds-Penrose
JTPA Program Manager
Employment Security Department
Training & Employment Analysis Division
605 Woodview Drive SE, MS
KG-11 Olympia WA 98504-5311
(206)438-4617

Ms. Brenda Boykins
Chief, Division Program Operations
500 C Street, N.W.
Room 300
Washington DC 20001
(202)639-1269

Mr. Griffin Brooks
Office of Instructional Programs
Georgia Department of Education JTPA Unit
1762 E. Twin Tower
Atlanta GA 30334
(404)656-2521

Mr. Raymond Cousins
Governor's Employment & Training Department
4615 West Broad Street
3rd Floor
The Commonwealth Building
Richmond VA 23230
(804)367-9826

Ms. Candy Curl
JTPA Program Coordinator
Washington Employment Security Department
Training & Employment Analysis Division
605 Woodview Drive SE, MS
KG-11 Olympia WA 98504-5311
(206)438-4630

Mr. John Curtin
Deputy Director, Division of Planning & Policy Development
New York State Department of Labor
State Office Campus
Building 12, Room 419
Albany NY 12240
(518)457-8881

Mr. Tom D'Elia
Assistant Director, Division of Employment & Training
New Jersey Department of Labor
CN 110
Trenton NJ 08625-0110
(609)984-2244

Ms. Mary DeGonia
President
Capitol Perspective
1915 17th Street, NW
Washington DC 20009
(202)265-5271

Mr. John Dorrer, Sr.
Vice President
Training & Development Corporation
P.O. Box 1136
117 Broadway
Bangor ME
(207)945-9431

Mr. Walter F. Dunlavey
Research Associate, Center for Labor Studies
Carnegie-Mellon University
School of Urban & Public Affairs
Pittsburgh PA 15213-3890
(412)268-2177

Mr. Robert A. Farina
Information Specialist
Center for Advanced Learning Systems, US DOL
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Room N-6511
Washington, DC 20210
(202)523-5600

Ms. Geri Fiala
US Department of Labor
ETA/OSPPD
200 Constitution Ave., N.W.
Room N-5637
Washington, DC 20210
(202)523-5600

Ms. Nadine S. Frindrich
U.S. Department of Labor, Region X
Employment & Training Administration
Seattle WA
(206)442-4543

Ms. Evelyn Ganzglass
National Governor's Association
Hall of the States
444 N. Capitol Street
Washington DC 20001
(202)624-5394

Mr. Jose Gomez
Right to Employment Administration
San Juan PR
(809)754-5690

Mr. Marque Haeg
Economic Development Department JTPA
155 Cottage Street, NE
Salem OR 973110
(503)373-1995

Mr. Sid Jaffe
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg PA 17126-0333
(717)783-6629

Mr. Martin Jensen
Executive Director
Partnership for Training & Employment Careers
1620 Eye Street, NW
Suite 328
Washington DC 20006
(202)887-6120

Mr. Robert D. Johnston
Director, Labor & Employment Security Division
Florida Department of Labor & Employment Security
1320 Executive Center Drive
#300
Tallahassee FL 32301
(904)488-7228

Ms. Linda Kinney
Office of the Deputy Director
Michigan Department of Labor
309 N. Washington
Box 30015
Lansing MI 48909
(517)373-9600

Ms. Linda Kirk
Office of JTPA Division Director
Nebraska Department of Labor
P.O. Box 95004
550 S. 16th Street
Lincoln NE 68509
(402)471-2127

Mr. Robert Levy
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Louisiana Department of Labor
P.O. Box 94094
Baton Rouge LA 70804-9094
(504)342-7693

Dr. Ronnie B. Lowenstein
Consultant
2808 Jermantown Road
Oakton VA 22124
(703)255-0990

Mr. Lennox McLendon
State Director of Adult Education
VA State Department of Education
P.O. Box 6Q
Richmond, VA 23216-2060
(804)225-2075

Ms. Patricia McNeal
Administrator
ETA/OSPPD
US Department of Labor
Room N-5637
200 Constitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
(202)535-0659

Ms. Holly Miles
c/o Miles and Associates
1045 Teviot Place
Salem OR 97304
(503)370-7303

Ms. Joan Modrell
Job Training of Greater Nebraska
941 O Street
Suite 500
Lincoln NE 68508
(402)471-3181

Mr. Gary Moore
Maryland Department of Economic & Employment Development
Office of Employment Training
1100 North Eutaw Street
Baltimore MD 21201
(301)333-7200

Ms. Jinx O'Neal
Section 123 Coordinator
Georgia Department of Labor
Job Training Division
148 International Boulevard,
Suite 650
Atlanta GA 30303-1751
(404)656-7392

Mr. William Sperling
Center for Program & Staff
Development
Seattle Central Community
College - SP-120
1701 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122
(206)587-3880

Mr. David Owens
Louisiana Department of Labor
Office of Labor - JTPA
Division 1001 N. 23rd St.
Annex
P.O. 94094
Baton Rouge LA 70804-9094
(504)342-7619

Mr. Harvey Taub
New York State Department of
Labor
One Main Street
Room 870
Brooklyn NY 11201
(718)797-7265

Dr. Ron Pugsley
Chief, Program Services
Division of Adult Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Switzer Building, Rm. 4428
Washington DC 20202
(202)732-2272

Mr. Raymond Uhalde
Deputy Administrator,
ETA/OSPPD
US Department of Labor
Room N-5637
200 Consitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20210
(202)535-0662

Mr. Joe Racak
Department of Employment
Security
605 Woodview Drive, SE
Mail Stop KG-11
Olympia WA 98504
(206)438-4611

Mr. David Van Wagner
Liaison Monitor - JTPA
Arizona Department of Economic
Security Site Code 920Z
P.O. Box 6123
Phoenix AZ 85005
(602)542-2492

Ms. F. Alexis H. Roberson
Director
Department of Employment
Services
500 C Street, NW
Suite 600
Washington DC 20001
(202)639-1000

Dr. Michael Sotos
Executive Assistant
Connecticut Department of
Labor
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield CT 06109
(203)566-1778

Mr. Alan Zuckerman
OICs of America
1511 K Street, NW
Suite 1041
Washington DC 20005
(202)737-2166

## Appendix C: Listing of Supporters Unable to Attend

Mr. Burt S. Barnow
Lewin/ICF
1090 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Suite 700
Washington DC 20005
(202)842-2800

Mr. John Bartlett
Executive Deputy Director,
Workforce Development
Texas Department of Commerce -
Resource Center
8317 Cross Part Drive
Austin TX 78754-5124
(512)834-6090

Ms. Pat Bell
Assistant to Deputy
Commissioner of Labor
New York State Department of
Labor
State Office Campus
Building #12
Room 568
Albany NY 12240
(518)457-5775

Mr. Jim Boyd
Office of Executive Deputy
Director,
Workforce Development
Texas Department of Commerce -
Resource Center
8317 Cross Part Drive
Austin TX 78754-5124
(512)834-6236

Dr. Betsy Brand
Acting Deputy Assistant
Secretary
U.S. Dept. of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Switzer Bldg., Rm. 4090
Washington DC 20202-7100
(202)732-2251

Dr. Louis Bransford
PSSC
600 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Suite 220
Washington DC 20024

Ms. Haidee Clark
Coordinator
Governor's Initiative for
Workforce Excellence
Room 336 - Brown Building
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia SC 29201
(803)734-0521

Ms. Jacqueline L. Cook
Literacy Specialist
234 Wyckoff Street
Brooklyn NY 11217
(718)522-5145

Ms. Jewell Dassance
Vice President, Program
Division
U.S. BASICS
1700 Diagonal Road
Suite 400
Alexandria VA 22314
(703)684-1265

Ms. Jill K. Day
Branch Manager, Technical
Assistance & Development
Division for Job Training
275 W. Main
2nd Floor, West
Frankfort KY 40601

Mr. Peter DeHueck
Secretary
South Dakota Dept. of Labor
700 Governor's Drive
Knerp Bldg.
Pierre SD 57501
(503)373-1995

Mr. Larry Gobelman
Deputy Director
Private Industry Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 1389
Ogden, UT 84402
(801)399-8858

Mr. Eli Gussen
Director, State JTPA
Administration
Connecticut Labor Department
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield CT 06109
(203)566-4298

Mr. Michael Hartmann
Director, Division of Job
Development & Training
221 Metro Drive
Jefferson City, MO 65109
(314)751-7796

Ms. Cynthia Heine
Consultant
9810 Kingsbridge Drive
#101
Fairfax VA 22301
(703)591-2020

Ms. Judy Hollister
Cabinet Council on Human
Investment
300 S. Washington Street
Suite 530
Lansing MI 48933
(517)334-6005

Mr. Robert J. Ivry
Manpower Development Research
Corporation
3 Park Avenue
32nd Floor
New York NY 10016
(212)532-3200

Ms. Carol June-Washington
Director, Federal Affairs &
Special Projects
New York State Department of
Labor
State Office Campus
Building 12, Room 542
Albany NY 12240
(212)457-8361

Ms. Julie M. Kilgrow
Director
Idaho Department of Employment
317 Main Street
Boise ID 83735
(208)334-6110

Mr. Lou A. Masci
Director, Employment & Training
Delaware Department of Labor
P.O. Box 9499
Newark DE 19714
(302)368-6810

Mr. Alan Melchior
Director of Program Assistance
Brandeis University
Center for Human Resources
60 Turner Street, P.O. Box 9110
Waltham MA 02254-9110
(800)3443-4705

Mr. Gary Paturaau
Director
Office of Literacy
P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge LA 70804-9004
(504)342-7015

Mr. Roland Patzer
Director
Job Training Partnership of Ohio
Ohio Bureau of Employment Services
145 South Front Street
P.O. Box 1618
Columbus OH 43216
(614)466-3817

Mr. Randy Richie
Chief, Employment & Training Division
Alabama Economic Affairs Department
P.O. Box 250347
Montgomery AL 36125-0347
(205)284-8800

Mr. John Rickicki
Coordinator, Curriculum & Instruction
Skills Training & Education Program
207 Montgomery Street
Bell Bldg. S. 700
Montgomery AL 36104
(205)242-5852

Mr. Glen Robards Jr.
Director
JTPA Oklahoma Employment Security Commission
Will Rogers Bldg
Room 209
Oklahoma City OK 73105
(405)557-5329

Ms. Laurie Strumpf
CETR Remediation Design
1133 15th Street, N.W.
Suite 1200
Washington DC 20005
(202)872-0776

Ms. June M. Suhling
Administrator, Employment & Training Policy
Department of Industry, Labor & Human Relations
201 E. Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 7972
Madison WI 53707
(608)266-2439

Mr. Charles Tetro
Training & Development Corporations
P.O. Box 1136
117 Broadway
Bangor ME 04401
(207)945-9431

Ms. Barbara Weinberg
Director
Nevada Job Training Office
400 West King Street
Suite 108
Carson City NV 89710
(702)885-4310

Mr. H.G. Weisman
Assistant Commissioner
Job Training Division
Georgia Department of Labor
148 International Boulevard, NE Atlanta GA 30303
(404)656-7392

Mr. Henry S. Woodbridge Jr.
Chairman/Executive Director
State of Rhode Island Workforce 2000
100 N. Main Street
Providence, RI 02903
(401)277-6700

Mr. Christofer P. Zachariadis
Executive Director
Association for Community
Based Education (ACBE)
1806 Vernon Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20009
(202)462-6333